

"Niece, enter and stand before me."
The Shaman advanced to my side and asked me courteously how I fared.
I answered: "Better. Far better. Oh, my friend, how are you named?"
"Simbir," he answered, "and my title is Hereditary Guardian of the Gate. By profession I am royal physician in this land."
"Did you say physician or magician?" I asked, carelessly, as though I had not caught the word. He gave me a curious look.
"I said physician, and it is well for you and your companion that I have some skill in by art. Otherwise I think, perhaps, you would not have been alive to-day. O my guest!—but how are you named?"
"Holly," I said.
"Oh! my guest, Holly."
"Had it not been for the foresight that brought you and the lady Khania to the banks of this darksome river, certainly we should not have been alive, venerable Simbir, a foresight that seems to me to savor of magic in such a lonely place. That is why I thought you might have described yourself as a magician, though it is true that you may have been but fishing in those waters."
"Certainly I was fishing, stranger Holly, for men, and I caught two."
"Fishing by chance, good Simbir?"
"Nay, by design, guest Holly. My trade of physician includes the study of future events, for I am the chief of the Shamans or Seers of this land, and, having been warned of your coming quite recently, I awaited your arrival."
"Indeed, that is strange, most courteous also. So here physician and magician make the same!"
"You say it," he answered, with a grave bow; "but tell me, if you will, would you die if you did not eat and whether visitors do not wander?"
"Oh," I answered, "perhaps we are but travellers, or perhaps we also have studied—medicine."
"I think that you must have studied it deeply since otherwise you would not have lived to cross those mountains in search of us, what did you seek?"
"Did he? Did he, indeed? Well, that is strange since he seems to have found one, for surely that royal-looking lady, named Khania, who sprang into the water and saved us, must be a queen."
"A queen she is, and a great one, for our land Khania means queen, though my friend Holly, a man who has lain useless as he has learned this I do not know. Nor do I know how you come to speak our language."
"That is simple, for the tongue you talk is so ancient, and as it chances in my own country it is so common to study and to teach it. It is Greek, and how it reached these mountains I cannot say."
"I will tell you," he answered. "Many generations ago a great conqueror of the nation that spoke this tongue fought his way through the country to the south of us. He was driven back, but a general of his of another name advanced and crossed the mountains and overcame the people of this land, bringing with him the usage of his worship. Here he established his dynasty, and here it remains, for being in the desert and with pathless mountain ranges he holds no converse with the outer world."
"I know some of that story, and the name of the conqueror, Alexander, was he not?" I asked.
"He was so named, and the name of the nation he conquered was that of a country called Egypt, or so our records tell us. His descendants hold the throne to this day, and Khania is his blood."
"Was the goddess whom he worshipped called Isis?"
"Isis," he answered, "she was called Rea."
"Which?" I interrupted. "Is another thing? Isis is a deity, is her worship continued here? I ask because it is now dead in Egypt, which was its home."
"No," he replied indifferently, "and in it are priests and priestesses who practice the rites of Isis, as they have of this people now, as long before the day of Ra-sen-her conqueror, is the fire that dwells in his body, which from time to time breaks out and slays them."
"And does the goddess dwell in the fire?"
"Ain't he searched my face with his cold eyes, the Holly, know nothing of any godness. Their mountain is sacred, and he comes to it to pray."
"Why do you ask such questions?"
"Only because I am curious in the things of this world, and I have been here to study some of wisdom in the sacred mountains."